

Community Assistantship Program

...a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)

Appetite for Change's Community Cook Program: A Qualitative Analysis

Prepared in partnership with
Appetite for Change

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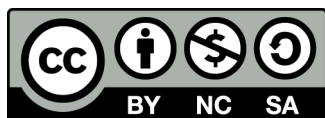
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Appetite for Change Community Cooks: A Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

Between February and May of 2012 Appetite for Change hosted eight events in its pilot Community Cooks program. A primary goal of the Community Cooks events was engaging participants around AFC's mission of using food as a tool for wealth, health, and change in North Minneapolis. AFC pursued this goal at the events using multiple strategies and for a range of purposes. The primary strategy used was one-hour dialogues that were facilitated by trained AFC staff. Another strategy was to put thought-provoking questions on butcher paper posted throughout the event space and encourage participants to write-in responses over the course of the program. These 'qualitative post-its' were intended to gather simple, direct input from participants and make the events more interactive.

The goals of engaging Northside residents were also multi-faceted. One of these goals was education and empowerment of North Minneapolis residents through dialogue around numerous issues related to the food system, including eating habits, preferences, shopping, cooking, issues of food access, and more. Another main goal of the events was to generate community input on how AFC should advance its mission in the community. A somewhat indirect though extremely important purpose of engaging participants was to tease out community members' various stakes, interests, and possible contributions to AFC's work. By engaging with and listening to community members, AFC intended to build community allies.

This report is intended to capture the variety of themes that emerged in AFC's far-reaching dialogues and in the qualitative post-its. The report is semi-internal in design as it is primarily intended to be used as a resource by AFC and those interested in better understanding Northside residents' food system-related perspectives. Given the depth and sheer volume of qualitative data gathered at the events, the analysis is strictly focused on interpreting the data gathered. While informative, a broader look at the complex structural and institutional dynamics that impact the Northside's food environment such as race, poverty, obesity, food access, etc. are not investigated. A rich literature exists on these topics both generally within the United States, and even specifically within North Minneapolis. Similarly, a detailed description of AFC's history, structure, and activities is also not provided. As such, the report will be useful alone but depending on the reader's objectives it may be most useful in combination with additional resources.

Methodology

The questions asked of the 240 program participants were designed to gain input from community members on topics related to the five Community Cooks strategic goals. These strategic goals included:

1. Bring Community Together Around Food
2. Share Ideas of What Food Means to You
3. Raise Consciousness of Food Options and Choices
4. Raise Awareness of the Power of Food to Create Wealth, Health and Change
5. Create a Valuable and Replicable Process¹

The questions asked were designed through facilitated sessions involving AFC staff and U of MN research support. Also co-designed by all AFC staff were questions that were put on butcher paper and posted throughout the event space. Each dialogue session included roughly 6 main questions and each event included roughly 6 large qualitative post-its.

Part-way through the eight Community Cooks events some of the dialogue questions and qualitative post-it questions were changed or modified to be responsive to the kinds of questions that were generating the most discussion. The changes also sought to shift the conversation away from 'favorite foods' discussions and direct more time toward dynamic conversations on the power of food as a tool for wealth, health, and change. The result of this shift is less qualitative depth for some questions, but also a greater breadth of community perspective on a broader range of questions.

Following the events, interviews and qualitative post-its were transcribed by evaluation research support from the U of MN. The qualitative data was then analyzed for themes both within questions and across questions. In general, the same concept or sentiment needed to be expressed by two or more participants in order to be considered a theme. In Section I the analysis is first presented in short paragraphs for each dialogue question asked. For Section II, themes are simply identified within each qualitative post-it question, with examples of each theme being provided directly from the data. A third and final shorter section at the end expands on themes that emerged throughout the dialogues in ways that don't particularly fit into any one question or category.

Formal coding of the data was not pursued nor was video of the dialogues reviewed given the time limitations. Thus despite the length of the analysis, there is a wealth of qualitative information (dialogue notes, post-its, and video) available for further or more rigorous analysis.

¹ This goal is internal to the organizational development of AFC.

Section I: Analysis of Dialogue Questions

Q: What will you eat for dinner tomorrow night, who will you eat it with, how do you feel about it, and do you wish it were different?

When asked this question, the notes reflect roughly 30 people who could describe a balanced meal they were planning on eating tomorrow night for dinner. Most of these answers described a meal that centered around a meat option such as chicken, fish, steak, hamburgers, or sloppy joes. The meat was often either fried or accompanied by a side such as gravy. Other common responses of healthier options were salad, spaghetti, rice & beans, etc. Only occasionally were sides of fruits or vegetables mentioned. Within this subset only a small handful emphasized that their meal for the coming day was completely planned. At least two of the participants describing a more complete meal included an older family member such as a mother or grandmother cooking. For example, one of the responses was, "My grandmother does the cooking every night we eat food like collard greens, cornbread, etc." Another comment was, "Tacos with pinto beans and rice, the salsa is already made, and my grandchildren will come, also with vegetables and potatoes."

Outside of these 30 responses, many people described foods they would either prepare quickly or eat out (i.e. fast foods). Home-prepared simple and/or quick foods referenced sandwiches, chips, cereal, nachos, and fries. At least several people simply expressed that they would eat whatever they could find in the cupboards or freezer. A common answer was that dinner would be eaten out or on-the-go. Common answers were McDonald's, Chinese food, Red Lobster, pizza places, and so on. The pressures that encouraged people to eat fast food included lack of time, a childhood association with fast food (i.e. McDonalds), and running out of EBT funds.

Q: Who do you usually eat with?

This question was only asked directly in two dialogues. Of those who responded, most referenced some combination of parents, siblings, children, or extended families. At least two said that they don't eat family meals together, but they wish they did. In many of the teen dialogues, participants mentioned eating alone which was related to snacking and eating out. Among adults, eating alone was more likely to be associated with eating out or on-the-go. In general, a theme that emerged and was referenced directly several times was that people tend to eat healthier when they eat together.

Q: Where do you grocery shop, with whom, and how often? How do you get there?

The majority of participants said they shop at a range of stores both within and outside of North Minneapolis. Most of these stores were large chain supermarkets or 'big box' stores such as Aldi's, Walmart, Sam's Club, Target, Cub Foods, Byerly's, So Low, Walgreens, and dollar stores. Multiple references were made to using

coupons and going where the deals are. One participant summed this up as, “I go lots of places to make my dollar stretch.” The food shelf was also referenced by multiple participants as a semi-regular source for supplementing groceries with additional canned and dried goods. Only a few people mentioned places like Trader Joes and co-ops (i.e. The Wedge). The notes only show one person who mentioned shopping at a farmers market. Corner stores were only mentioned a few times, and at least once they were described in negatively in terms of price, availability, and quality.

Despite the emphasis on coupons, prices, and deals, multiple other factors were included in residents’ grocery shopping habits including quality, distance, social factors, and even customer service. One participant noted that she always supports her local stores, whereas several others described how they prefer to walk. Many participants identified particular stores with higher quality meat or produce. Aldi’s was identified by a participant because she sees more neighbors there.

Regarding the frequency of shopping, most responses ranged between once a week and once a month. Most responses were in the middle of this range, or 2-3 times per week. Two or three participants noted shopping in small amounts but much more frequently, even everyday. Most dialogue participants drove to the store either in their own vehicle, borrowing a car, or car-pooling with family and friends. The bus, taxi, and walking were also mentioned but much less frequently.

In sum the dialogues indicate that North Minneapolis residents’ shopping habits are largely influenced by price, but also a complex set of other factors including availability, quality, and location. Interestingly, corner stores were not discussed much, though this may be due to the age demographics of most participants (somewhat older adults, parents, etc.). The neighborhood’s closest large supermarket, Cub Foods, was mentioned as only one of many larger supermarkets and budget grocery stores, even once being described by participants as only a “backup.” The responses to this question suggest that North Minneapolis residents (like all consumers) are resourceful, astute grocery shoppers for whom the closest grocery or corner store may not be utilized as lower prices, better availability, or other preferences compel them to shop around at stores of various distances.

Q: Do you feel like you have a lot of food options in North Minneapolis?

This question was also only asked at two events, and is on record as only being asked directly in two dialogues. In these limited responses participants agreed that food options in North Minneapolis are limited. One participant felt that all she had access to in her neighborhood was Aldi, So Low, fast food (McDonalds, So Low, and Chinese take-out). Participants were quick to begin listing the other areas of the Twin Cities they frequent for food outside their neighborhood (i.e. Brooklyn Center).

Q: What would make shopping and/or cooking easier?

The strongest themes that came out included more time, more support, and more education. Time was a limiting factor for many participants who said their work, family, and other obligations made them feel like finding the time to plan and prepare healthy, whole meals was too difficult. One participant noted that, "When I eat fast food, it's for convenience, not the food." More support meant a sharing of food-related responsibilities at home. One participant said, "I need more help in the kitchen. I also need my family to understand how to eat healthy and know why we try to cook new healthy things." In one of the teen dialogues there was broad-based acknowledgement of their ability to help out their parents with shopping and cooking. The teens also admitted they could help out more with food at home.

Interest in more education related to more recipes, advice or instruction from a nutritionist, learning time & budget management skills, and more knowledge about variety. Some basic information participants learned in dialogues was that farmers markets were cheap when produce is in season and most accept WIC & EBT. Interestingly, in this section only two people mentioned better access to healthy, fresh food and only two people mentioned affordability. This is interesting because cost & access dominate the literature and discussion about health & the food system, but they did not emerge as major themes in these dialogues. Lastly, two people also mentioned having a safe neighborhood & store to shop in.

One of the interesting solutions participants were interested in was buying stock in a women's collective that would make change in the community through pooling resources, time, and knowledge to make shopping and cooking easier.

Q: Why is it important to eat or sell healthy food in North Minneapolis?

The responses to this question were direct, deep, but also nuanced. One of the strongest themes regarding the importance of eating and selling healthy food in North was that, as one participant said, "It will stop adult & youth epidemics of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity." Other consistent responses were that eating healthy leads to a longer, healthier, happier life. More nuanced responses on the importance of selling and eating healthy food in North included responses such as, "Bad food leads to bad attitude leads to violence." Here the quality of food is being connected to people's health, sense of self-worth, feelings/emotions, and resulting actions. Another common response was the economic value to the neighborhood of eating and selling healthy food, with one participant noting, "Selling healthy food in our neighborhood will bring money back into our community." Another participant said, "It will employ families."

A thread that came out in this question but also throughout the dialogues was that, "You can't prefer something you've never had." Increasing the prevalence and consumption of healthy food simply allows people to get to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy food. Another noted that, "It takes time to build preferences." Participants said that many North residents are not currently

consistently exposed to healthy options and supported in choosing them. Another participant said, “We lack awareness of what food does to us.” Lastly, the importance of eating healthy was linked to the social cohesion of families, with one resident simply stating that regularly eating healthy, “Keeps families together.”

While many of these responses have already been noted, one of the teen dialogues so keenly and directly identified these deeply interwoven issues that it is worth replicating in its entirety. In response to this question, the teen dialogue participants responded,

“A: Its important because we want to be healthy.

A: It is because eating healthy will extend our lives.

A: Selling healthy food in our Nhood will bring money back into our community.

A: This will improve our community by having a healthier community.

A: It will keep our hearts healthy so we don’t have high blood pressure due to the high amount of salt we eat in our diets over north.

A: It will help curb obesity and expand our life.

A: When we eat healthy foods we feel healthier.”

This excerpt makes it obvious that teens are acutely aware of the food-related challenges they, their generation, and their community faces, and that they must be part of the solution.

Q: If you could create the ideal food store what would it be? What would it sell and why would it be so great?

This question was intended as a visioning exercise that would tease out what qualities in a local food establishment are important to North Minneapolis residents. Some practical suggestions were to remove junk food from the front of the stores and rather to promote healthy foods, basic necessities, etc. Some participants referenced stores they perceived to have good cost, healthy options, and good customer service such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s. In more grand visions of the ideal food store in the neighborhood, one teen described a store that employed local residents, composted, had a garden, had a variety of fresh food, organic options, and a deli for to-go or sit-down meals. While this might sound overly idealistic, it is actually an identical description to many of the local co-ops. Another participant described a soul-food deli. Another idea that came up multiple times was a farmers market with local vendors and local produce. These responses demonstrate that Northside residents desire healthier, more fresh food with more variety, but also culturally specific foods. They also are acutely aware of business practices that will invest in residents (i.e. jobs) as well as creating stores that are social hubs for the neighborhood.

Q: Could food be used as a tool for wealth? If so, how?

Participants understood food both as a tool for saving money and for generating income. For the former, food was identified as a tool for wealth because growing, cooking, and preserving food saves families and communities money. One participant identified the cost-savings that come from food education (i.e. cooking knowledge) when she said, "We need to teach people how to make the most out of the least and stretch their dollar." One of the benefits of gardening mentioned was that you won't have to buy the same food you grow from the store. On the latter (generating income), participants identified gardening, catering businesses, and other food-related businesses as potential sources of wealth.

Q: Do you feel like you have the power to change your food options and environment?

The majority of respondents stated that yes they did have the power to change their food options, though several did not. Of those that did not, some of the reasons included, "Store owners are still going to do what they want to do no matter what you say," and, "No because a lot of people and vendors don't want to come into north Minneapolis and we don't have any say." Another reason cited was that grocery stores, "May feel like minorities may not purchase their product." These negative responses indicate a feeling of powerlessness, in part due to issues of race and class, which participants were acutely aware of throughout the dialogue in reference to multiple issues in the community. Any effort to improve food options on the Northside must be conscious of the mental and physical barriers people face due to poverty and racism, such as the historical experience of low-income people and people of color being excluded from decision-making processes. These efforts also must be realistic enough to know that these problems will not be solved overnight.

Another common theme in how people believe they can change their food options is through collectively demanding it. The collective part of this effort was seen as essential. One participant said people must utilize an, "Each one, teach one," approach. Another person said, "It has to be a community effort. I don't think I have power singly but maybe I do in a group." A third person said, "As a community we have to say we have our money and want to spend it here."

How people collectively demand it was also approached in several ways. One method mentioned several times was being empowered consumers, only putting their dollars in stores that offered healthy options. Inversely, one participant mentioned they could, "Collectively change and influence food options by refusing to spend money at certain locations." However, simply demanding better food options was tempered by comments that acknowledged this strategy's complications. One participant had keen understanding of urban development dynamics when she related a story she read about how "Marketing studies for Kowalskis (a healthy, upper-scale supermarket chain) are all based on how many college grads are in the neighborhood."

Two other strategies besides empowered consumerism were mentioned. One suggested that marketing could play a strong role in changing the food environment, especially for children. At least two participants also acknowledged the role of political campaigning and policy change. One woman said, "For people who have the stomach for it, we need them to work on policy change."

Lastly, while some felt not necessarily able to change built food environment, individuals shared how they felt they could change their actions within their environment to make healthier choices. One of these strategies included sticking to the outside aisle at grocery stores and avoiding the processed foods in the center rows. Another person mentioned cutting out greasy foods and drinking less soda. Amongst a teen dialogue almost all participants said yes they could change their food options, either by becoming vegetarian, influencing the family's choices, or through influencing friends' behaviors.

Section II: Qualitative Post-it Analysis

The questions used for the qualitative post-its are below, followed by themes that emerged from residents' responses. Quotes (verbatim) are also included for each theme.

What's a positive Food Memory from your childhood?

Theme	Quote
Fond remembrance of parents', grandparents' cooking	Cooking with , grandma, auntie collard greens, spinach, corn on cobb, banana puddin, peach cobbler, applie pie, sugar peanut butter and oatmeal raisin
	My mom's peach cobbler and red beans rice.
Soul Food (especially greens!)	Fresh greens from my grandfather's garden.
	A warm and filling beef stew! Chili w/ cornbread, Sunday Soul Food dinners.
	Everyone knows I love greens, greens remind me of all the times I couldn't eat other foods. It was the only food that made me feel great about all the nutrients I gained. :)
Food and Family Cohesion	Cooking with my mom, dad, grandmas, aunts-uncles.
	Everyone going to the farmers market as a family to pick out the ingredients for dinner and cooking the meal together.

If your family ate healthy more often, how would they be different?

Theme	Quote
Healthier	Healthier, less prone to illness, live longer.
	I feel healthier, and will avoid getting sick.
	Feel healthy, rejuvenated, more balanced holistically.
More energy	We'd have more energy.
	More energy and it would feel good!
	More energy. Alert.
Keen perception of the intersection between food and health, energy, mood, capabilities, etc.	Wouldn't be so lazy, wouldn't get sick so often which leads to having to take medications (not good), wouldn't have as much difficulty in school as healthy foods reduce a lot of behavior "issues," would have more energy to take more time to raise children, work, self-improvement, etc.
	More energy, better sleep, feeling better, more active, happier the healthier they are.

	They would feel happier and be more active. They would see weight loss. They would feel better, less health problems.
	More energy, better teeth, better concentration at school. They might have a longer life span and they can pass healthy eating on to their peers and family.
More/better self confidence	They feel more better about they self.
	They would feel a lot better about themselves.

If you could make shopping and cooking easier in your life what would you change?

Theme	Quote
Making a plan	Making a meal plan & creating a grocery list from it
	I would create a shopping list and write down what I need
Time & Money	Food cost: Budgeting makes me anxious
	Cost (food).
	The time it takes to shop.
	Change the prices.

Do you want to eat differently? Do you feel like you could change your eating or cooking habits? If yes, how?

Theme	Quote
Yes, but cost is perceived as a barrier	Yes, healthier if it did cost so much- fruit, vegs.
	I want to eat better and I try but I can't afford to do it consistently.
	Yes, I want to get more vegs. but they cost too much in North Minneapolis
	Yes, but cannot the food cost on my monthly income.
Yes, change is possible through simple dietary shifts	Yes! I would learn to make food either with less fat/salt or pay attention to food hormones.
	Definitely, I could work more fruits and veggies into my meals and eat less junk and fried foods.
	Yes, portion control, varieties of veggies & fruit, not eating late after 6 pm. Water intake according to body mass index.
Eating out less would significantly improve diets	I would stop eating fast food :)
	Not eating out

If you could create your ideal place to get food- what would it look like, what would it sell, why would it be so great?

Theme	Quote
Soul food & international food	I would love to open a soul food Mexican restaurant it would sell lots of greens and cabbage pasta taco's ribs steam veggies Hot tamales. It would be great because different nationalities people would come from all over to eat.
	Something international a place for EVERYBODY It would sell soul food certain fast food items with less fat/salt etc. and it would be great to see people actually eat fruit including me and to see everyone take a chance at better health the key is follow through.
Elements of 'home' and 'home cooking'	My ideal place to get food would be set up like a house, fresh garden around ¾ of the outer area. A made to order healthy menu, and a salad & sandwich shop pre-prepared. Lots of bottled water, no soda.
	Like home. And it will sell low fat foods and it would be great cause I would be loseing weight.
	My own place- Home cooking meals just like home.
High quality healthy food, good customer service, and low prices	I would open something like whole foods in N Mpls, but it would be far more affordable & include diverse staff & cultural foods.
	Food the quality of Lunds and Byerly's but affordable for the community.
	The ideal place would be similar to whole foods but half the price. The ideal place will sell smoothies, wheatgrass shots, & stir fries w/ lots of veggies. There will also be seminars to teach healthy cooking & food preps.

Why is it important to have people selling healthy foods in the community?

Theme	Quote
Healthy foods lead to healthy people	It helps decrease the level of obesity
	You don't have to go to the doctors office for health

Will give people more choices	problems
	Encourages the community to eat healthy foods
	To have more variety...more choices is a good thing!
	Health issues, quality foods, more choices So it spreads and everyone start making some better choices

Who do you eat dinner with? Why? How does that make you feel?

Theme	Quote
People generally feel good when eating together	My kids and it make me feel like a good mom.
	Family make me feel great cause it good to eat with Family.
	My boyfriend- connects us more :)
	My family it makes me feel good because I like when the food is good, you see their faces and compliments.
	I eat with family, and it makes me feel family-based.
Eating alone is less enjoyable	Usually alone, not as fun.
	Myself, sad sometimes but I get over it.

Do you feel like you have a lot of options to get a variety of foods on the Northside? Why or why not?

Theme	Quote
Memorable 'No's'	Not at all, Everything over here is either fried or grilled and they don't really give you enough options. You would usually have to go somewhere else for variety or to the farmers market for healthy and variety.
	NO! There are more stores that sell tobacco products than fresh food. There aren't many period. Usually healthier, organic, variety food cost more.
	No it drives me nuts that we can have Aldi's but no Trader Joes but they are owned by the same corp.
	No I think they target the stores for what is selling not what's best for our bodies. And the healthy food is high \$\$\$.
Concern about freshness, variety, and cost	No quality and prices don't match.
	No and the ones that are here food is never even halfway fresh.

	No fruits are too high, and fresh veg's are too
Yes, but variety is all unhealthy	Yes, if I want unhealthy options. If I want healthy foods I usually have to wait until summer for the farmers market.
	Yes, not quality food. We have to go out of area for nutritional food. Too many fast foods, low quality fried food restaurants, hooks.
Some (though much fewer people) are satisfied with their options	Yea, Cub's food is pretty convenient & it is easy to access food. Also there are a lot of churches that provide dinners.
	Yes, cause the variety isn't the food but what you do with it.

Could food be a tool for wealth in your community or family? How?

Theme	Quote
Food as a tool for making money	Yes for your family. You could start a business with healthy meals that could help the community.
	Grow your own veggies and sell them to your community so that they can eat healthy.
Food as a tool for saving money	Yes, making lunch at home saves so much \$.
	Yes, more in the home means \$\$\$ in your pockets. You get to know what's in it and make better food choices.

Section III: Additional Themes

Theme 1: People generally eat healthier and are happier when they eat together.

Throughout the events it became clear that when people eat together (as families, partners, neighbors, communities, etc.), there are a range of benefits. People constantly referenced that eating together was generally associated with more balanced, healthier meals. Eating as a family also made people feel better about providing for their families, teaching their children how to eat well, and spending time together. In the teen dialogues, when teen participants referenced a healthy meal, it often was a meal prepared by a parent. Furthermore, when people shared positive food memories from their childhood, the references to mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were nearly as frequent as references to particular food. While perhaps simple and seemingly redundant, this theme is largely summed up in a participant's statement, "I eat with my family and it makes me feel family-based." Taken in sum, these various threads suggest that good nutrition and social cohesion generally went hand in hand. Conversely, eating alone generally was associated with people eating quickly, unbalanced, more fast food, treating 'food as fuel', and generally being less satisfied.

Theme 2: Connection between food justice and social justice

The health of North Minneapolis residents related to food choices, options, habits, environment, etc. was frequently mentioned within the context or in reference to broader issues of justice. In other words, food justice was often defined in reference to or as a smaller part of broader social, racial, and economic justice.

For example, race was a crucial issue throughout the dialogues. Many participants noted that the inequities and disparities in food access, diabetes, obesity, etc. in the African-American community in North Minneapolis are caused and compounded by other racial inequities. One dialogue focused on these larger issues, like the fact that North Minneapolis is segregated and that, "We are still treated like 3rd class citizens." Other deeply entrenched issues outside the food system were also addressed, such as red lining, the need for affordable housing, unemployment, and the need for good jobs. In addition to strategies like urban farming, boycotting stores like So Low, and supporting farmers markets, a number of culturally-specific strategies were mentioned such as:

- Support within the black community to work together
- More male role models
- Challenge assumptions on food choices of black community

This theme suggests that issues of *food justice cannot fictitiously be separated from other issues of social justice in the community*. It also suggests that AFC must be open

to culturally specific articulations of issues with the food system, as well as culturally specific solutions.

Independent Community Initiative (“Do it Ourselves”)

Multiple dialogue participants stressed the importance of not letting someone else solve the Northside’s health & food issues for them. While many people identified access as a real issue, others also argued that people must want to change and the community must do it themselves, regardless of circumstance. Changing eating habits and growing more of their own food were two common examples. This will require concerted effort amongst individuals and groups to implement difficult but necessary solutions to community problems related to the food system. For AFC this might mean it should approach its work as ‘building community capacity’ as opposed to ‘service and program delivery.’ Addressing these issues from within the community will require many people gaining a skill set they may not currently have. As such, AFC might think of the key function of its programs as meeting the organizing, education, and capacity-building needs in North Minneapolis to create healthy communities and a healthy food environment.